

critical digest

VOL. IV No.4

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Twilight Walk-Fulton, 9/24/51. Richard W. Krakeur presents A.B.Shiffren's new play with Nancy Kelly, Charles Proctor, Ann Shoemaker and Walter Brooke. Staged by Paul Stewart.

Digests of Current Reviews - more digests on Page 3

Borscht Capades-Royale, 9/17/51. Two daily critics recommended Hal Zeiger's "English Yiddish" musical revue for those who don't understand the second language. But majority thought show either had too limited an appeal or they classed it as poorly done vaudeville. Coleman, Mirror, and Chapman, News, enjoyed show though they understand no Yiddish. Singer Haasche won top notices, with a wide split of opinion on merits of comedian Phil Foster, Dave Barry and Mickey Katz. Several suggested that most of material needed cutting. Atkinson, Times, rated Foster's monologues as a hilarious, humorous bit of Americana. Dash, Women's Wear, thought most of show was ancient, rather than nostalgic. Watts, Post, pondered if the managements of Bagels and Yox and this show may not have made an error inviting the critics. The audience the show appealed to has little need of critics' verdicts in picking entertainment. Several agreed with Watts' comment that show was better than Bagels and Yox, but not very much.

Diamond Lil'-Broadway, 9/14/51. Mae West's latest visit to Gotham was greeted with the usual reactions from the daily critics. They all continue to love Mae, but not her play. The George Brandt production of Mae's own play, first shown in 1928, was by-passed in the reviews. Her five leading men looked exactly like the rest of her former casts, the reviewers agreed. Watt, News, and Funke, Times, guessed that you had to see the play with Mae once. Coleman, Mirror, noting that the play was attracting theatre fans who hadn't been to a show in years, recalled that he had turned down a role in the original production. Herald Tribune reporter filed news story on one million dollars worth of Harry Winston jewels Mae wears in show, while World Telegram & Sun didn't file any review. After many visits to the show, Watts, Post, is firmly convinced that the play is a satire on sex. This has always been the case, but audiences are only now becoming sophisticated enough to realize it. Journal American critic remarked that extra scene added in London was not played opening night, though the management promised it would be added.

Out of Town Reviews

Theatre Guild's production of Saint Joan starring Uta Hagen debuted in New Haven to split notices from trade reviewers. Golly, Billboard, rated it as strictly carriage trade fare that needed much revision in overlong and wordy script. Hagen plays role much too lustily, he complained, but he placed the blame on misdirection. Bone, Variety, found her characterization perfect in a perfect production.

News & Notes

Love and Let Love postponed until October 16...Arts of the Theatre Foundation play contest won by Ray Lapica and Elizabeth McFadden Wright...Russell Nye, back from Hollywood film job, will not re-enter Call Me Madam cast until Jeff Warren's 12 week contract expires...New Dramatists Committee to set up offices and workshop at City Center.

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. Commentary |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

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| AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50 | - Con: 1-6-9-12-15-16-17-18-22-24-28-29-32.
None: 10-14-21-23-25-26-27-31. |
| BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51 | - Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-11.
None: 12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30. |
| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50 | - Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3.
None: 10-14-21-23-31. |
| GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50 | - Con: 6-26. So-So: 16-19-24-25-33.
None: 10-21-23-31-32. |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 | - Con: 26. None: 10-21-31. |
| LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/4/51 | - Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-25-33.
None: 12-22-23-26-27-28-29-30-31-32. |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51 | - Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-23-24-31. |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 | - Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-23-26-31-32. |
| THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51 | - Con: 4-6-7-12-16-22-32-33.
None: 10-17-21-23-24-27-31. |
| SEVENTEEN-6/22/51 | - Con: 2-7-26-29-30-33.
None: 10-21-22-23-27-28-31-32. |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 | - Con: 33. So-So: 25.
None: 5-9-10-11-21-23-24-26-27-28-31. |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51 | - Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 4.
None: 10-21-22-23-31. |
| A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51 | - Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33.
None: 10-15-21-22-23-31. |
| TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51 | - Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-23-27-28-31-32. |

' TV & Radio Notes '

Max Gordon named producer of CBS TV Frank Sinatra show...Shubert-owned plays and sketches put on TV market for live and filmed production...September 30 CBS TV Toast of the Town to feature "The Helen Hayes Story"...Margaret Webster and John Mason Brown, SRL, discussed Shaw's St. Joan on CBS Invitation to Learning...Equity okayed televising of Berlin Oklahoma production...NBC TV Lucky Strike Theatre to produce GBS' Cashel Byron's Profession November 19...Paul Denis, former Compass columnist, may start disc jockey show...Televised first nights may resemble baseball telecasts, fears Chapman, News...Is Chamberlain Brown serious in giving his Theatre Record Club Award to "The Ad Libbers" asks O'Brian, Journal American...

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' Green Room Department '
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CRITICAL ACTION...Bagels and Yox producers adopted two suggestions of the daily critics. They abolished the onstage microphone and promised to add violins instead of brass wherever possible. Borscht Capades producers cut out the onstage microphone before opening night.

SUBSIDIZED THEATRE...Theatre unions must contribute \$10,000 each for a permanent lobby in Washington, suggests Show Business editorial. The AFL and the CIO must mobilize to back federal subsidy to bring theatre to the 97 per cent of the nation that has never seen a play. Federal money spent from taxes for theatre would be used in the common good to make the nation better and happier.

COLUMN TIPS...George Jean Nathan will be named Theatre Arts critic in November, informs Winchell...Out of town legitimate theatre fans will soon be seeing top hit plays and musical comedies live via Theatre TV, predicts Farrell...Ginger Rogers unhappy about third act of Love and Let Love whispers Wilson...Is Ward Morehouse going to join the Herald Tribune, asks Winchell.

SCALING PRICES...City Playhouses president, Louis Lotito, is in favor of more extreme grading of prices of theatre tickets, he told Hawkins, WT&S. At the 46th Theatre he would like to price up the section in front of the cross aisle, even upholstering it differently. He would call it "parterre." The extra money would go to the people who made the show, and the other seats might be cheaper. When you got a hit, he said, nobody asks the price; and for a flop you can't give it away.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Watts, Post, is pretty sure the following London hits will also be hits on Broadway this season: Olivier's two Cleopatras, Waters of the Moon, and The Little Hut...Stage children don't have to be unnatural little monsters, complains Chapman, News. Most people have the wrong ideas about child actors; he is all for them...Martha Wright does a lovely job as the new lead of Broadway's South Pacific, comments Burr, Playbill.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Lace On Her Petticoat-Booth, 9/4/51. Minor refreshment is how Krutch, Nation, feels the Herman Shumlin production of Aimee Stuart's new play will be found by many playgoers; though he admitted he wasn't much concerned with the plot. Production and acting were rated as superb. It is unblushingly theatrical in method, though genuine in feeling and in the main outline of its action, convincing. Today the theme is gentle and wistful rather than dogmatic or indignant. It all fails to be exciting because the direction and acting alike are very sure in style and pace. But it remains a pleasant interlude.

Bagels and Yox-Holiday, 9/12/51. Broadway is not the place for the Franksy and Beckman resort type "American Yiddish" revue, the trade paper critics and three weekly reviewers agreed. So far the news weeklies have ignored the opening. Variety placed the review on its vaudeville page with Jose stating that such a show sets race relations back years. Francis, Billboard, joined Jose's opinion that the Brandt owned theatre can switch back to double features easily. Gabriel, Cue, Morehouse, WT&S, and George Jean Nathan don't like what little they understood. Mary Forrest received mild praise, but most of cast was panned. Trade paper reviewers also pointed out that the theatre wasn't equipped to present shows of any kind. Nathan wrote off the entire proceedings as delicatessen...Morehouse admitted that he could only take half of it.

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' Meet the Critic - Brooks Atkinson '
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Theatre is the highest and most independent of the performing arts, Brooks Atkinson told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. The New York Times critic has no fears that TV will injure the theatre. What little he has seen of TV has been inferior and certainly no competition to the stage. Actually theatre has been out of the cheap entertainment field since the advent of the talkies, he explained. Ordinary entertainment seems dim and boring in comparison. Furthermore, theatre has to be good to be successful. Because of the slight financial gain involved it has remained free politically and intellectually, something the mass mediums cannot claim.

The mere fact that the daily papers devote so much space to drama news and reviews is proof enough that there is such a thing as a theatregoing habit, Atkinson answered. Theatre information from Broadway has a vital news aspect, or it wouldn't deserve a place in the papers. People out of town, he discovered, are well informed of the new plays and players. He views his own job as Times' critic as that of a reporter with a specialized function. His first duty is to tell if he himself liked the show, and then to tell briefly what the show is about. At no time does he feel anyone gave him the authority to urge or lecture his readers to see a certain show or attend the theatre more often.

High prices of tickets, difficulty in obtaining seats and sometimes an attitude that theatre isn't good are the reasons the Times' reviewer believes more people don't attend the theatre more often. The critic admitted that if he had to scramble about to get tickets for every show, he doesn't know how many he would attend. Though Atkinson usually doesn't pay much attention to the many theatre awards, he does find the NY Drama Critics Circle and Pulitzer Prize Awards valid. But the selection of a particular player as "best" in any field always embarrasses him. Usually there is a play and a musical that is such a stand-out that it can be classified "best." Last season the musicals Guys and Dolls and The King and I seemed tied for such an honor. The Times' critic never discourages the many young writers who ask him how they might become drama critics. But he does point out that the number of available posts becomes smaller each year.

Concerning the controversial question of ANTA, Atkinson believes they have done their best job in producing works which would not ordinarily be seen on Broadway. There is a definite need for such a program as ANTA's Experimental Theatre.

Atkinson, a graduate of Harvard, started in the theatre field as assistant drama critic of the Boston Transcript. Before that he was a reporter in Springfield, Mass., and an instructor of English at Dartmouth. He joined the NY Times in 1922 as Book Editor and became Times' drama critic in 1925. During the war he served as Times' correspondent in China and later in Moscow. His Russian dispatches won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. "Once Around the Sun," his current book has won the unanimous reviews of all his colleagues.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Shows that closed include Gentlemen Prefer Blondes...Mark Barron, AP, called for Army physical...Betty Hale, Theatre Arts, to be married October 29...Howard Barnes, former Herald Tribune critic, giving lectures to colleges and women's groups ...Critics not to pay for tickets to ANTA series this year...All-Negro "Hamlet" of Howard University may be sent to Denmark next summer...Canada Lee filming "Othello" in Rome...ANTA to honor dress manufacturer Henry Rosenfeld November 12 and Elsa Maxwell October 26...Play contest in honor of slave girl who became poet, Phillis Wheatley, being sponsored by the National Phillis Wheatly Foundation, 2170 East 46 Street, Cleveland...ANTA board being reorganized along broader base.

